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Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys

Scrutiny Panel Dip Sampling Exercise

Domestic Abuse Victim Attrition

Panel Members' Findings & Feedback

November 2023

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1.0 Overview, Background, Purpose and Methodology

The Quality Assurance handbook, available on the [PCC's website](#), states the background and purpose of the Panel along with how the dip sampling is carried out and what the Panel is asked to consider.

On 22 November 2023, members from the Quality Assurance Panel met at Dyfed-Powys Police Headquarters for an extraordinary session as part of a wider piece of work undertaken by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC).

The OPCC was appointed as the lead organisation to co-ordinate a project mandated within the Dyfed-Powys Local Criminal Justice Board's 2023/24 Delivery Plan: A project considering domestic abuse victim attrition; why victims of domestic abuse withdraw their support from investigations.

On 28 November 2023, the OPCC hosted a multi-agency Workshop, inviting criminal justice partners and support service representatives to discuss domestic abuse victim attrition. The aim of the Workshop was to identify the issues resulting in victim attrition, as well as what steps attendees' organisations may be able to take to reduce attrition rates across the Dyfed-Powys area.

To bring an independent voice to the multi-agency Workshop, the OPCC asked Quality Assurance Panel members to review recent cases of domestic abuse where the victim had withdrawn their support for an investigation. Their findings were then intertwined into discussions at the Workshop.

A Detective Chief Inspector leading on domestic abuse for Dyfed-Powys Police (DPP) met with Panel member prior to their case review, to provide an overview of domestic abuse and attrition across the Force area. Panel members, together with OPCC staff, considered 15 cases of domestic abuse, where the victim had withdrawn their support either at:

1. the initial stage of police contact,
2. during the investigation (pre-charge), or
3. post-charge.

In their review, Panel members were asked to focus on the victims' rationale for withdrawing their support. They were also asked to share their thoughts on whether the CJ agencies involved could have done anything further to prevent victim attrition.

2.0 Review of Domestic Abuse Cases

Panel members findings are detailed below under the three stages listed above, where victim attrition may occur.

2.1 Initial police contact

Panel members identified the following rationale within the case files for victims' withdrawal at initial police contact:

- Refusing to support an investigation from the offset in that the abuse was out of character and they were not fearful of the alleged offender.
- Refusal of police contact, i.e., the victim did not answer calls nor respond to messages from the police.
- The impact an investigation may have on their children.
- Requesting that the incident was recorded so that it was on record, but that they did not wish for it to be investigated further.
- Victims not providing evidence requested by the police.

Panel members identified positive aspects of the cases reviewed:

- Investigations were very detailed, with evidence of officers considering evidence-led investigations.
- Relevant partner agencies such as Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) were involved.
- Referrals to services such as Dyfed Drug and Alcohol Service (DDAS) were discussed with some victims, although this was refused by both the victim and perpetrator in one case.
- Safeguarding advice was given in most cases, with a lot of information shared in person, during phone calls, and by email.

Initially, the latter point was identified as positive; even though the victims did not wish to pursue the investigation, they were provided with a lot of information on support services, safeguarding and safety plans. However, Panel members then queried whether this wealth of information could in fact overwhelm the victim and push them towards withdrawing their support. They questioned the Force's position on the provision of information.

For most cases reviewed, it was agreed that there was nothing further the criminal justice agencies involved could have done to get the victim to support an investigation, because the victims were not pursuing the complaint for personal reasons. However, a small number of suggestions were put forward:

- In a case where the victim refused to support an investigation or to provide her personal/contact details, it was identified in the online enquiry log that the victim was vulnerable and had been a victim of domestic abuse previously. Panel members suggested that that victim ought to have been provided with information regarding support services and whom to reach out to if she experienced domestic abuse again.
- In a case where the perpetrator's alcohol consumption was identified as a causal factor of abuse, there was no evidence in within the online enquiry log of the consideration of a referral to DDAS or a similar programme. One Panel member emphasised that *"perpetrator behavioural change is the most important thing"*.
- Some victims withdrew due to the impact an investigation may have on their children. Panel members suggested that the provision of details to victims as to how an investigation may improve the situation at home, for example through rehabilitative programmes focusing on perpetrator behaviour, may

encourage victims to support an investigation. It was noted that perhaps not enough information about these programmes is shared with domestic abuse victims at this early stage.

- In one case a failure in applying Claire's Law was identified. Panel members queried whether the victim would have withdrawn had the suspect's history of similar offending been disclosed.

2.2 Pre-charge

Panel members identified the following rationale for attrition during an investigation before the alleged offender is charged:

- Three of the five victims withdrew due to the impact a trial/guilty outcome may have upon family life. In one case for example, the victim withdrew support as she did not want to affect the alleged offender's visiting rights with his children from a previous relationship.
- In another case, both the victim and the alleged offender had cancer, and the victim wished to focus on their health, noting that she relied heavily on the alleged offender for support physically.
- In the fifth case, it was not obvious to the Panel member reviewing, why the victim did not want to proceed with the investigation. The online enquiry log states that the responding officer's body worn video was on during the discussion with the victim, but the Panel did not have access to the video during their review of the case.

Panel members identified positive aspects of the cases reviewed:

- Safeguarding advice was given and relevant partner agencies involved.
- House-to-house enquiries had been made and evidence sought in consideration of an evidence-led prosecution.

In terms of what the criminal justice agencies involved could have done to get the victim to support an investigation, again, for most of these cases, it was agreed that there was nothing further they could have done. However, a couple of thoughts were shared:

- In one case, substance misuse by the alleged offender was identified as a causal factor, and Panel members were unsure whether a referral to specialist services had been discussed.
- In the above-mentioned case where the victim withdrew support so as not to affect the alleged offender's visiting right, it was highlighted that in the victim's statement, she explicitly stated she had not been coerced into withdrawing her statement. The Panel member was unsure whether this was something the victim would specifically have been asked by the officer taking her statement or if she had written this of her own accord. If it was the latter, the Panel member queried whether this would have been investigated further, as the victim stated that she had seen the alleged offender since the incident in question.

2.3 Post-charge

Panel members identified the following rationale for attrition after the perpetrator was charged:

- Victims wished to restart their relationships with the perpetrators. For example, in one case, after 25 years in an abusive relationship, the victim wanted the alleged offender home and withdrew her support for the investigation. Whilst in another case, where the perpetrator had breached bail to tell the victim to drop the case, the perpetrator was willing to receive mental health support and the victim wanted to help her through that.
- The rationale for two victims withdrawing their support was not evidenced in the online enquiry log considered. In one of these cases, the victim simply did not join the live link to the court trial which had been arranged by an IDVA.

Panel members identified positive aspects of the cases reviewed:

- There was evidence of extensive safeguarding advice in the online enquiry logs where the two victims wished to restart their relationships.

For each of these cases, Panel members could not suggest any steps the criminal justice agencies involved could have taken to maintain victim support.

3.0 Comments and Observations for Force Response

Observation	Force Response
<p>Safeguarding advice was given in most 'initial police contact' cases: A lot of information shared in person, during phone calls, and by email.</p> <p>Initially, this was identified as positive; even though the victims did not wish to pursue the investigation, they were provided with a lot of information on support services, safeguarding and safety plans.</p> <p>However, Panel members then queried whether this wealth of information could in fact overwhelm the victim and push them towards withdrawing their support.</p> <p>They questioned the Force's position on the provision of information.</p>	<p>Actions identified at the multi-agency Domestic Abuse Attrition Workshop will help to ensure that the information provided to victims at the initial response is accurate and informative.</p> <p>Victim support agencies representing victims stated in the workshop that even though the information could be seen as an overload, victims need the information to re-visit in their own time and it therefore needs to be provided at the outset.</p>
<p>Panel members suggested that the provision of details to victims as to how an investigation may improve the situation at home, for example through rehabilitative programmes focusing on</p>	<p>A Detective Inspector from the Force's Public Protection Hub is meeting perpetrator programme managers in February seeking to improve officer awareness.</p>

perpetrator behaviour, may encourage victims to support an investigation. It was noted that perhaps not enough information about these programmes is shared with domestic abuse victims at this early 'initial police contact' stage.	'DA matters' training has also focused on use of language and officers informing victims on the effectiveness of how a criminal justice process could improve the family situation.
In a 'pre-charge' case where the victim withdrew support so as not to affect the alleged offender's visiting right, it was highlighted that in the victim's statement, she explicitly stated she had not been coerced into withdrawing her statement. The Panel member was unsure whether this was something the victim would specifically have been asked by the officer taking her statement or if she had written this of her own accord. If it was the latter, the Panel member queried whether this would have been investigated further, as the victim stated that she had seen the alleged offender since the incident in question.	When victim states that they wish to withdraw support from the investigation we follow guidance from the College of Policing which states that a statement is required from the victim and that this needs to cover that the victim is making their choice on their own free will. <i>Criteria: "whether the victim has been put under pressure to withdraw or has been subjected to threats or intimidation"</i>

4.0 Multi-Agency Workshop

The Quality Assurance Panel was represented by OPCC staff at the multi-agency Workshop, through the sharing of their findings, thoughts, and queries where relevant to discussions.

The findings of the Multi-Agency Workshop have been incorporated into a Report and shared with attendees. The ideas identified as to how attendees' organisations may work to reduce attrition have been incorporated into an Action Tracker and shared with attendees.

The Workshop findings will also be considered at an all-Wales level, as similar Workshop have been co-ordinated, or will be co-ordinated, across the Gwent, North Wales, and South Wales policing areas.

The OPCC is grateful for Panel members' willingness to partake in this extraordinary dip sampling session, and for their enthusiasm for the task in hand.